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HOW TO SUPPORT SHY, NERVOUS, INTROVERTED CHILDREN THROUGH BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

Transitioning back to school can be a complex emotional journey for children, particularly for those who are shy, anxious, or introverted. As parents and caregivers, it's essential to navigate these delicate emotions effectively. This comprehensive guide provides a step-by-step approach to understanding and supporting shy children during this challenging period.

By following these steps, you can better understand shyness in children and provide effective support during the back-to-school transition period.



Step 1

Understanding Shyness

- Shyness is a common feeling characterized by nervousness and self-consciousness in new social situations, around new people, or when in the spotlight.
- It's a natural part of temperament, often emerging in infancy and remaining consistent through development.
- About 15% of children exhibit this temperament trait.

Step 2

Recognizing Shyness in Children

- **Social Withdrawal:** Shy kids avoid new social situations, often preferring solitude, or one-on-one interactions.
- **Eye Contact Avoidance:** They may shy away from direct eye contact, feeling self-conscious.
- **Limited Verbal Expression:** Shy children may struggle to express themselves verbally, using fewer words or speaking softly, especially in unfamiliar settings.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Some may exhibit physical signs like blushing, trembling, or fidgeting in uncomfortable social situations.
- **Difficulty Initiating Conversations:** Shy kids wait for others to initiate interactions and find it challenging to start conversations.
- **Minimal Participation in Groups:** They tend to observe rather than actively participate in group activities.
- **Anxiety in New Situations:** New environments or people can trigger anxiety, with signs like nervousness and clinging to a trusted adult.
- **Hesitancy to Speak Up:** In class, they may hesitate to answer questions or share thoughts.
- **Difficulty Making Friends:** Forming new friendships may take longer, as they require more time to build trust.



- **Sensitivity to Criticism:** Shy children can be highly sensitive to criticism and easily discouraged.
- **Familiar Settings Preference:** They feel more comfortable in familiar environments and resist change.
- **Limited Extracurricular Participation:** Shy kids may avoid extracurricular activities involving social interaction.
- **Public Speaking Challenges:** Speaking in front of a group can trigger extreme anxiety or stage fright.

Step 4

Recognizing Back-to-School Emotions

- The start of a new school year brings a mix of emotions for children, including excitement to reunite with peers and nervousness about new teachers, clubs, or sports teams.

Step 5

Addressing Shy Children's Back-to-School Unease

- Shy children can feel particularly uneasy as the new school year approaches due to unfamiliarity and unpredictability.
- New teachers and peers in a new environment may contribute to their fear and anxiety.
- Don't force a child to feel that they must overcome their shyness as this can be negatively interpreted or have negative impacts.

Step 6

Managing Negative Predictions

- Shy children might make negative predictions about upcoming events, amplifying their nervousness.
- They may predict that new teachers won't be nice, they won't know classmates, or they won't find their way around the school.



Step 7

Strategies for Supporting Shy Children

1. **Reduce the Unknowns:** Engage your child in discussions and creative exercises to help them envision the upcoming school year. Regular talks about seasonal changes and what to expect can alleviate their worries.
2. **Highlight Strengths:** Emphasize the positive aspects of shyness, such as their keen observation and listening skills.
3. **For Children in the Same School:**
 - **Promote Friendships:** Foster openness to new friendships and explore ways to maintain relationships with friends in different classes.
 - **Connecting with Old and New Friends:** Encourage your child to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones, especially those who are also new to the school and looking for friends.
 - **Offer Independent Comfort Tools:** Provide independent activities or items (e.g., a stuffed animal, a game/book, drawing in a notebook) that can offer comfort or help manage difficult situations.
4. **For Children Attending a New School:**
 - **Familiarize with the Environment:** Visit the school or classroom before hand to make them more familiar with the surroundings. Practice the route to school and introduce them to teachers or staff. Seek out a buddy who can accompany your child on the first day.
 - **Find a Buddy:** Explore the possibility of your child having a buddy to spend the day with.
5. **Encourage Self-Reflection:** Encourage your child to jot down reminders when they feel shy at school. Use these notes as a basis for supportive conversations.
6. **Leverage Natural Curiosity:** Children are naturally curious and often supportive of new students. Typically, there are one or two classmates who are extroverted or caring and take on the unofficial role of welcoming and introducing new students.
7. **Teacher Support:** Teachers frequently encourage and facilitate friendships for new students, contributing to a welcoming environment.



Step 8

Enhancing Familiarity

- Exposing shy children to their new environment can increase their comfort level as the new school year approaches.
- Familiarity can reduce negative predictions and help them connect with peers and teachers more easily.

Step 9

Differentiating Normal Shyness from Concerns

- Shyness is common and can have benefits, like careful observation and listening.
- However, researchers suggest that severe shyness can interfere with school participation and increase the risk of anxiety disorders.

Step 10

When to Seek Professional Help

- If a child's shyness significantly hampers their ability to interact with others, complete schoolwork, or engage in daily activities, it might indicate a clinical concern.
- Seek professional attention if shyness starts to negatively impact their overall well-being.

For more support, take a look at our community resources below or reach out to us at info@aocan.org, or call 519-208-5333.

- **Community Resources:** <https://aocan.org/resources/>

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